

WildlifeExpress

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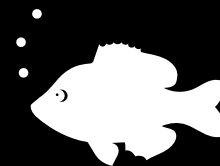


PANFISH

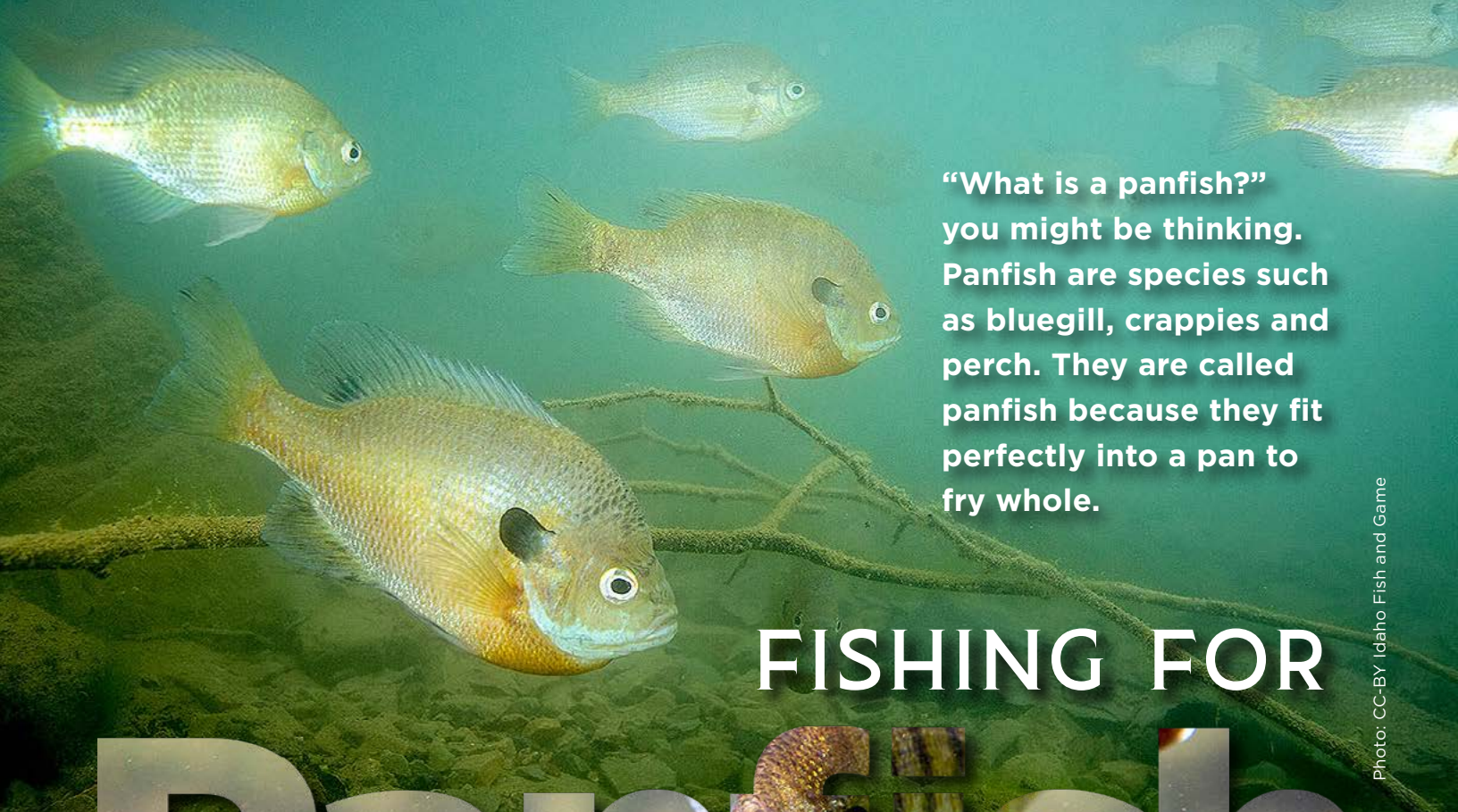
Photo: CC-BY Maxime Clermont-Flickr.com

inside

Bluegill
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**“What is a panfish?”
you might be thinking.
Panfish are species such
as bluegill, crappies and
perch. They are called
panfish because they fit
perfectly into a pan to
fry whole.**

Photo: CC-BY Idaho Fish and Game

FISHING FOR

Panfish

Panfish have been introduced to Idaho. That means people brought them to our state; they were not found here naturally. They are native to parts of the United States east of the Rocky Mountains. Panfish were brought to Idaho so people could enjoy catching and eating them.

One thing panfish have in common is spines. They have spines in their fins and on their gill covers. The dorsal fin, or back fin, contains the largest spines. Panfish use the spines as a defense against predators. They stick their fins out when they feel threatened. The hope is the predator will be jabbed by a spine and leave the panfish unharmed. If you go fishing for panfish, this is something to remember. One way to avoid being stuck is to place your hand in front of a fin. Then slide your hand down over the fin making it lay flat. This will allow you to gently hold the fish without getting an unpleasant poke.

Most panfish are found in warmer lakes, ponds, reservoirs and slow-moving rivers. They need shallow areas that have water plants. These areas offer safe places to lay eggs and for young fish to feed and grow.

Panfish may be small, but that doesn't mean they are not exciting to catch. Sitting around a park pond catching saucer-sized bluegill can be a blast! It's a great way to shake off the winter blues and welcome back spring. Like many warmwater fish, panfish tend to be most active during the spring, so you are likely to catch a bunch.

Fishing for panfish, or panfishing, is fun and easy. It's the perfect way to experience fishing for the first time. You can catch panfish with some simple tackle. Try fishing with a piece of nightcrawler underneath a bobber. You can also catch panfish with a jig combined with a small

soft plastic grub. You should cast your line around water plants where the water is less than 10 feet deep. Give panfishing a try sooner rather than later in the summer. March through June is the best time to find panfish in shallow water, since this is when they spawn or lay eggs.

Many park ponds and reservoirs will have panfish. To find a place to fish near you, visit Idaho [Fish and Game's fishing planner](#). The fishing planner has all kinds of information. You can find a pond near you and discover what fish live in the pond. You can find maps, stocking reports, and other valuable information.

Before heading out, remember that Idaho residents 14 years-of-age or older will need a valid fishing license. Most panfish are under general fishing rules but be sure to check the current Idaho [Fishing Seasons and Rules booklet](#) for exceptions. Also remember to pack snacks, drinks and anything else that will make the day enjoyable. Most of all, have fun!

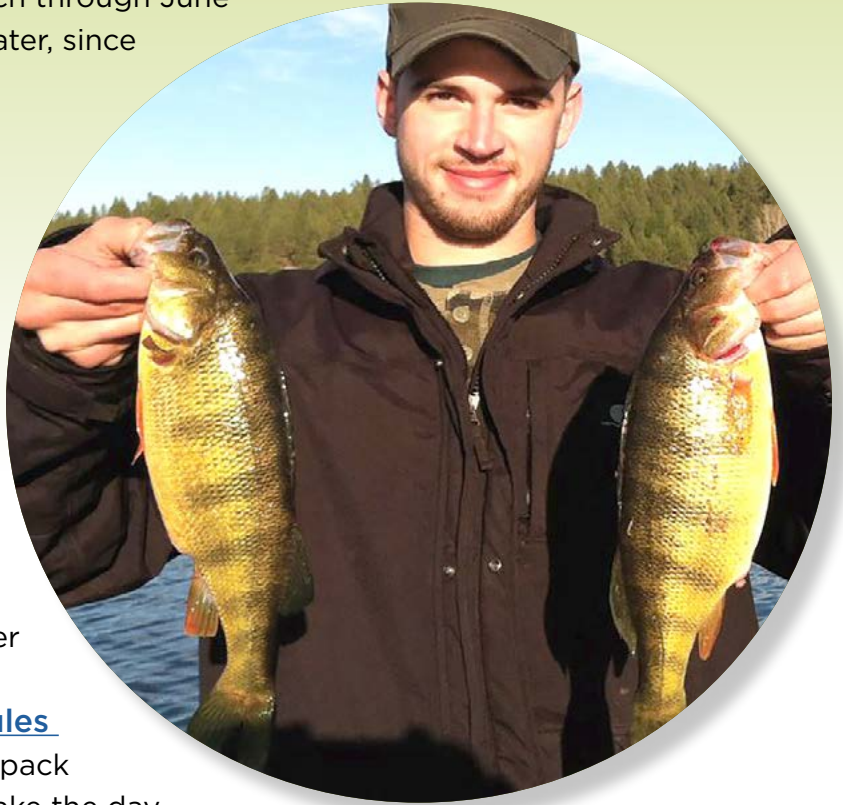



Photo: CC-BY Cody Janssen at Idaho Fish and Game

Pumpkinseed Photo: CC-BY Patrick Randall at Flickr.com



A close-up photograph of a bluegill fish's head, showing its large eye with a prominent blue ring, its mouth, and its operculum (gill cover). The fish has a mottled pattern of brown and orange spots on its scales.

Let's take a closer
look at some panfish
that live in Idaho.

Bluegill Photo: CC-BY Natdiglib.com

BLUEGILL

Bluegill are one of the most common fish found in park ponds. They live in warm, shallow ponds, lakes, reservoirs and slow-moving rivers. They are often found around water plants in water that is less than 16 feet deep.

Bluegill got their name from the colorful markings on their bodies. There can be quite a bit of variation in their colors, but one thing they all have is a blue-black spot on the gill covers. Dark olive-colored bands often run down their sides and their bellies are orange to yellow. You might see iridescent light-blue lines running under their chins and up onto the gill covers.

Bluegill are an important food source for other animals, so they spend a lot of time hiding among plants, fallen logs and other structures in the water. Another thing they do to protect themselves is hang out with other fish. They are usually found in schools of 10 to 20 fish. Sometimes these schools contain other panfish



Photo: CC-BY Idaho Fish and Game

like crappies and pumpkinseeds. If a predator attacks, the school will scatter. This helps to confuse the predator by making it difficult to focus on one fish to catch.

Bluegill also form large groups when it comes time to spawn or lay their eggs. As many as 50 males come together to make nests.

Crater-like nests are made by scooping out gravel and sand at the bottom of shallow water. Males are very protective of their nests. They will chase away just about anything that comes too close. Even humans have experienced the wrath of a protective bluegill father.

The one thing males let close to their nests are females. Females are choosy. They like males with larger bodies and big spots on their gills. To impress the females, the males' bellies turn bright orange, and they do a song and dance routine. Males circle their nests and make grunting noises. If a female likes what she sees and hears, she will enter the nest. The two circle each other and bump bellies. The female then releases her eggs in the nest, and the male fertilizes the eggs by spraying them with milt. Once the eggs are laid and fertilized, the male's protective nature kicks in again. He chases the female away and guards his eggs. Males guard the eggs until they hatch, and the baby bluegill are able to swim away. This will be between eight to 13 days. The warmer the water, the faster the eggs and young will develop.

Bluegill eat anything they can fit in their small mouths. Young eat zooplankton or microscopic animals floating in the water. Adults eat algae, insects, snails, leeches, worms and minnows. To help them catch food, bluegill use their mouths like vacuums. They out stick their lips and suction food into their mouths.

Head to a pond near you and see if you can catch bluegill. All it takes to hook into a bluegill is a little worm on a hook. They may be small, but that doesn't mean they aren't fun to catch. They are pretty tasty, too!



Bluegill Photo: CC-BY natdiglib.com

Photo: CC-BY Idaho Fish and Game



PUMPKINSEED

Pumpkinseed were named because their bodies are the shape of a pumpkinseed. These fish look a bit like bluegill, but they are more colorful. They also have a blue-black spot on their gill covers, but their spot has a half moon red-orange spot next to it. Pumpkinseed are covered with vibrantly colored scales in colors ranging from olive-green or brown to bright yellow-orange and blue. Their bellies are yellow-orange, and their cheeks are covered with turquoise-blue lines. These fish are beautiful!

Pumpkinseed spawn in spring and early summer. The males make nests in colonies of three to 15 males. Since pumpkinseed like to spawn in the same areas as bluegill, they often make nests near each other. Pumpkinseed and bluegill will interbreed, and hybrids have been found in Idaho.

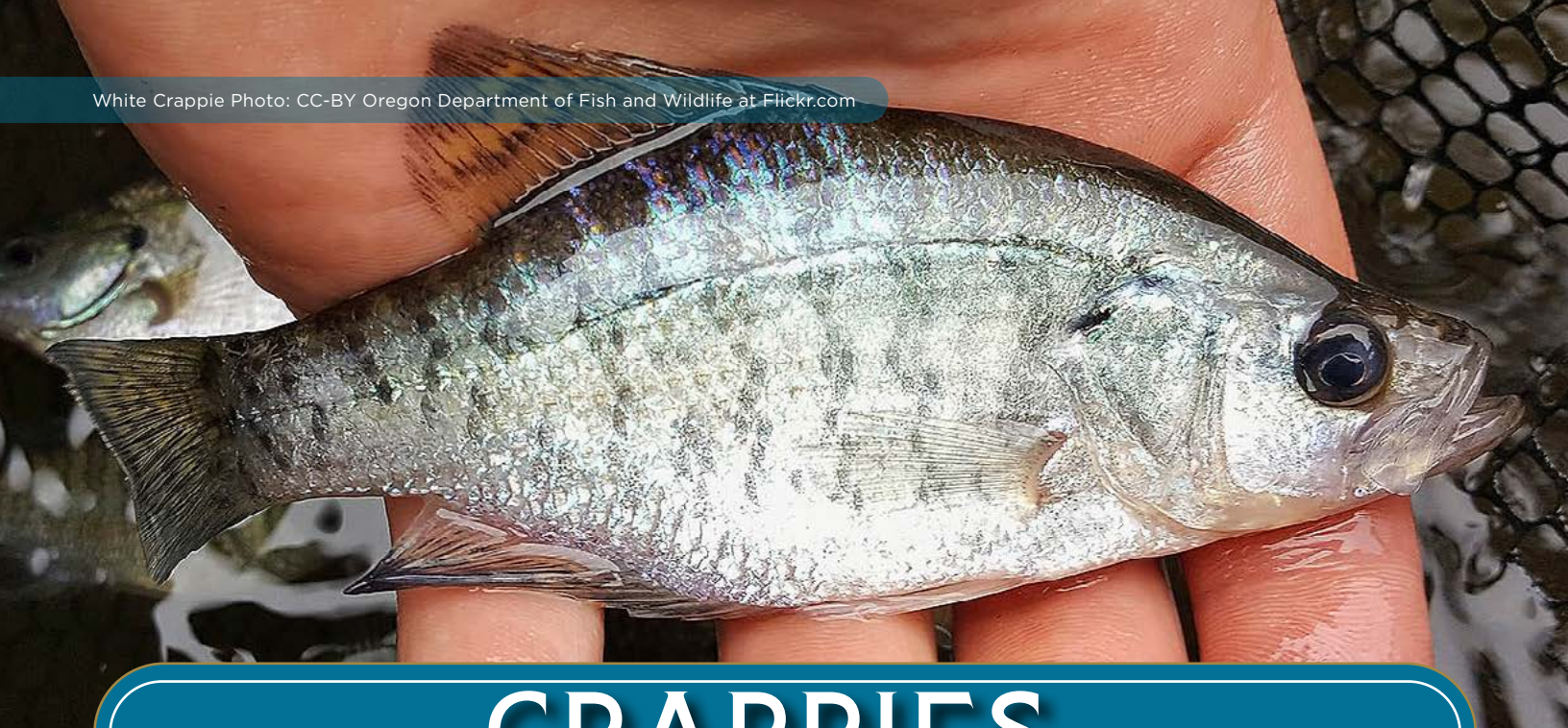
Pumpkinseed aggressively defend their nests until the eggs hatch and the young are about 11 days old. If a baby pumpkinseed wanders out of the nest, the male will gather the baby up in its mouth and return it.

During their first year of life, young pumpkinseed stay close to the nesting area or form schools close to shore. They eat zooplankton and grow to about two inches in length.

Adults tend to travel in groups of two to four in slightly deeper, covered water. Pumpkinseed look for food during the day at all levels in a pond, from top to bottom. Insects, snails, worms and minnows are all on the menu. At night, they rest close to the bottom of the pond.

Pumpkinseed use the spots on their gill covers for protection. The spots look like eyes to predators. The location of the spots give the illusion of large eyes that are higher back on the body. When a pumpkinseed flares its gills and makes the gill covers stick out, the fish looks four times larger than its true size. This is sometimes enough to make a predator think it has chosen the wrong fish to eat. What a great adaptation!





CRAPPIES

In Idaho, we have both black and white crappie. Although they have similar life histories and look a bit alike, there are ways to tell them apart. The best way is to look at the back or dorsal fin. Black crappie have seven or eight sharp spines in the fin; white crappie have five to six spines. The spots on the fish are also different. Black crappie are covered with irregular black spots and blotches. White crappie have faint, spotted vertical lines down their bodies. Black crappie like quieter water, while white crappie are fine in water with a bit of current.

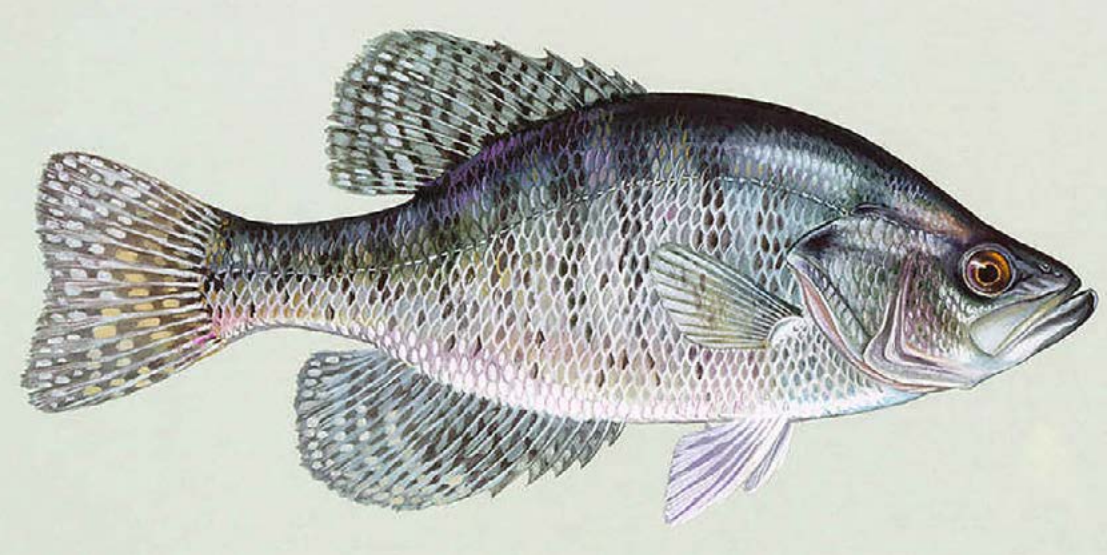
Crappies are most abundant in large, warm, clear lakes and reservoirs or slow-moving rivers. They are usually found around large beds of water plants with sandy or muddy bottoms. During the day, schools of crappies hang out near vegetation or submerged objects. The night is made for eating.

Crappies feed mainly at night and in the early morning hours. Prime feeding time

for crappies is usually between midnight and 2:00a.m. To help them hunt at night, crappies have eyes designed for the dark. Their eyes contain a structure called a tapetum lucidum (ta-PEE-tuhm LOO-see-duhm). This structure reflects light off the back of the eye and stimulates light-sensitive cells a second time, improving night vision. This is what causes eyeshine in cats and dogs when a light hits their eyes in the dark; their eyes appear to glow.

When it is time for crappies to spawn, males gather together in loose groups to make nests.





Males guard the eggs until they hatch, which takes about two or three days. Newly hatched crappies are nearly transparent and tiny; they are only two millimeters long. That's smaller than a grain of rice! These little fish stay in the nest, protected by the male, for two to

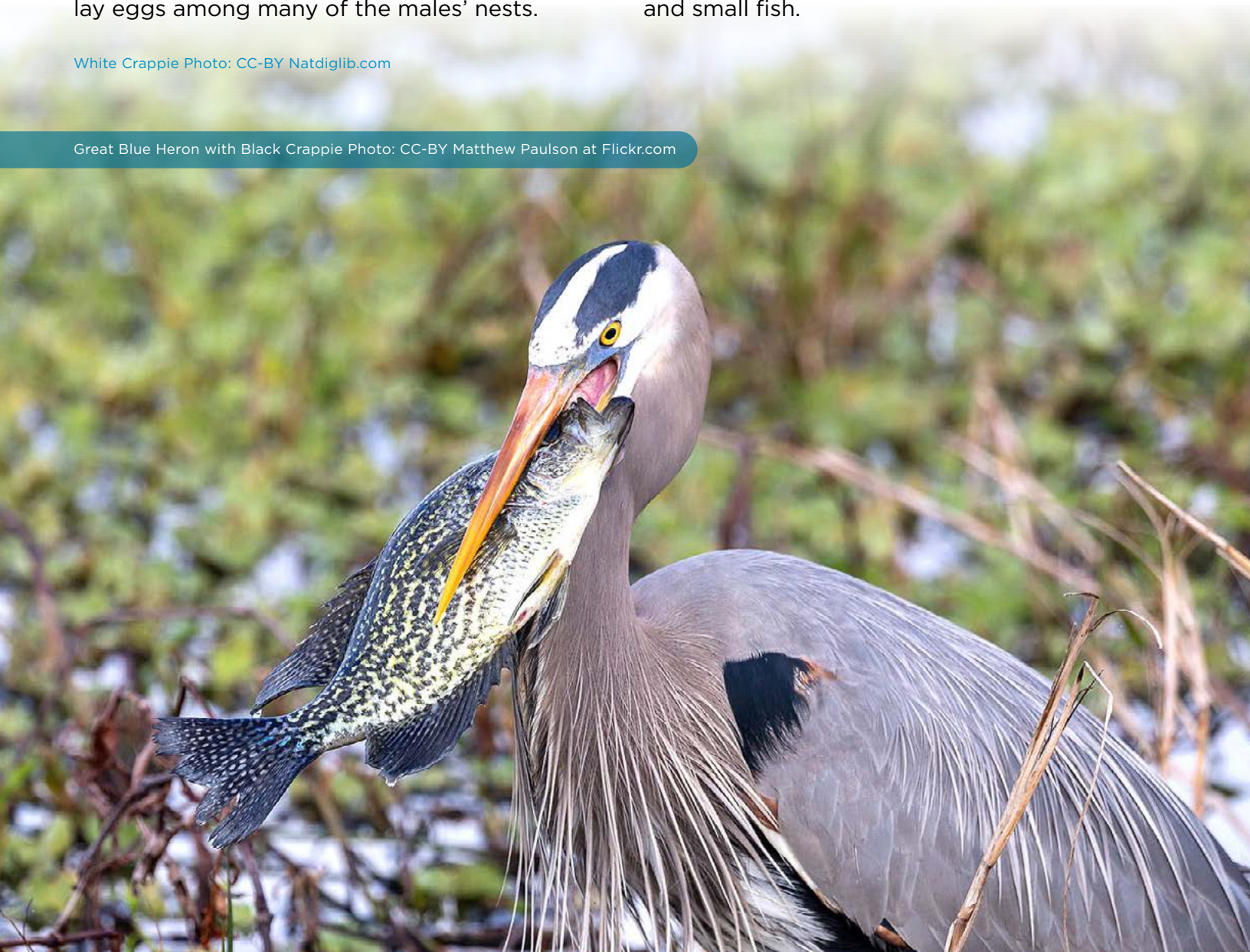
The perfect place is in protected areas with little to no current where the water is one to six feet deep. They clear away the sand and mud making a small depression. Females make an average of 40,000 eggs, but some may produce over 100,000 eggs! Females usually lay eggs among many of the males' nests.

four more days. Then they form schools and move to shallow, sheltered water to feed on zooplankton and grow.

Smaller crappies eat a lot of zooplankton and insect larvae. Larger crappie eat aquatic insects and small fish.

White Crappie Photo: CC-BY Natdiglib.com

Great Blue Heron with Black Crappie Photo: CC-BY Matthew Paulson at Flickr.com





Yellow Perch Photo: CC-BY Natdiglib.com

YELLOW PERCH

It is easy to see how yellow perch got their name. They have a yellow-green color on their backs and sides. Darker colored bands run from their backs to their bellies. The fins are usually not yellow; they are orange.

Yellow perch average around seven to nine inches, but their size varies from lake to lake. “Big” perch are 12 inches long. Cascade Lake is known for having the right conditions to grow “jumbo” yellow perch. The largest yellow perch caught and kept in Idaho weighed 3.22 pounds and was 16.25 inches long. It was caught in Cascade Lake. The catch and release record was also caught in Cascade Lake. It measured in at a whopping 17 inches!

Yellow perch are a fish that can give you quite a poke. The fin on the back closest to the head is really pokey. It has 13 to 15 sharp spines. The other fins closest to the tail are softer, but still have one or two spines. This is a fish that you should handle with care!

Yellow perch spawn in April or May when the water temperature reaches 45 to 50 degrees Fahrenheit. Unlike trout and other panfish, yellow perch do not lay their eggs in nests. To give the eggs some protection, yellow perch lay their eggs in shallow water close to water plants. Reeds, cattails or fallen trees will help protect the eggs from predators. Females release their eggs during the night or early morning. The eggs are deposited in long ribbons of jelly-like material. These ribbons stick to plants, logs or rocks in the water. In about 10 to 20 days, the eggs hatch. After hatching, young yellow perch travel together in schools. They grow slowly in Idaho, unless they live in a warm lake or reservoir with lots of food.

Young yellow perch eat zooplankton they find in shallow water among plants. As they grow, yellow perch switch to eating aquatic insects and small fish.

Keep an eye out for yellow perch in lakes and reservoirs. They are rarely found in flowing water.



Fishing and Exploring



Photo: CC-BY Isaac M at Flickr.com

Fishing is a fun outdoor activity to do with friends and family.

It is especially exciting when the fish are biting! When fishing is slow and you just cannot seem to hook a fish, your outdoor experience can still be great! Instead of getting frustrated and ending your outing, take a break. Reel in your line and try something new. Here are some things to do.

Bring along a fishing journal. You can record the time you were fishing, the weather, what you used for tackle, the water conditions and what fish you saw or were lucky enough to catch. Recording your experiences will help you make decisions in the future about when and how to fish.

Turn over rocks in the water and see what insects you can find. This might help you to pick a new bait, lure or fly to try.

Take a hike around your fishing area. What birds and animals do you see? Do you see anything in the environment that has changed? Would this change affect fishing?

Have a picnic and something to drink. It is amazing how different things seem when you are not distracted by hunger and thirst!

Look and listen for wildlife near the water. Do you see something that might have scared fish into hiding like an osprey?

Look at and around the water for insects.

Are there a lot of insects hatching from the water? Sometimes there is so much food, fish just are not hungry for what anglers have to offer.

With an adult, pick up litter to keep your angling area pollution free. Remember to pick up used fishing line. Animals

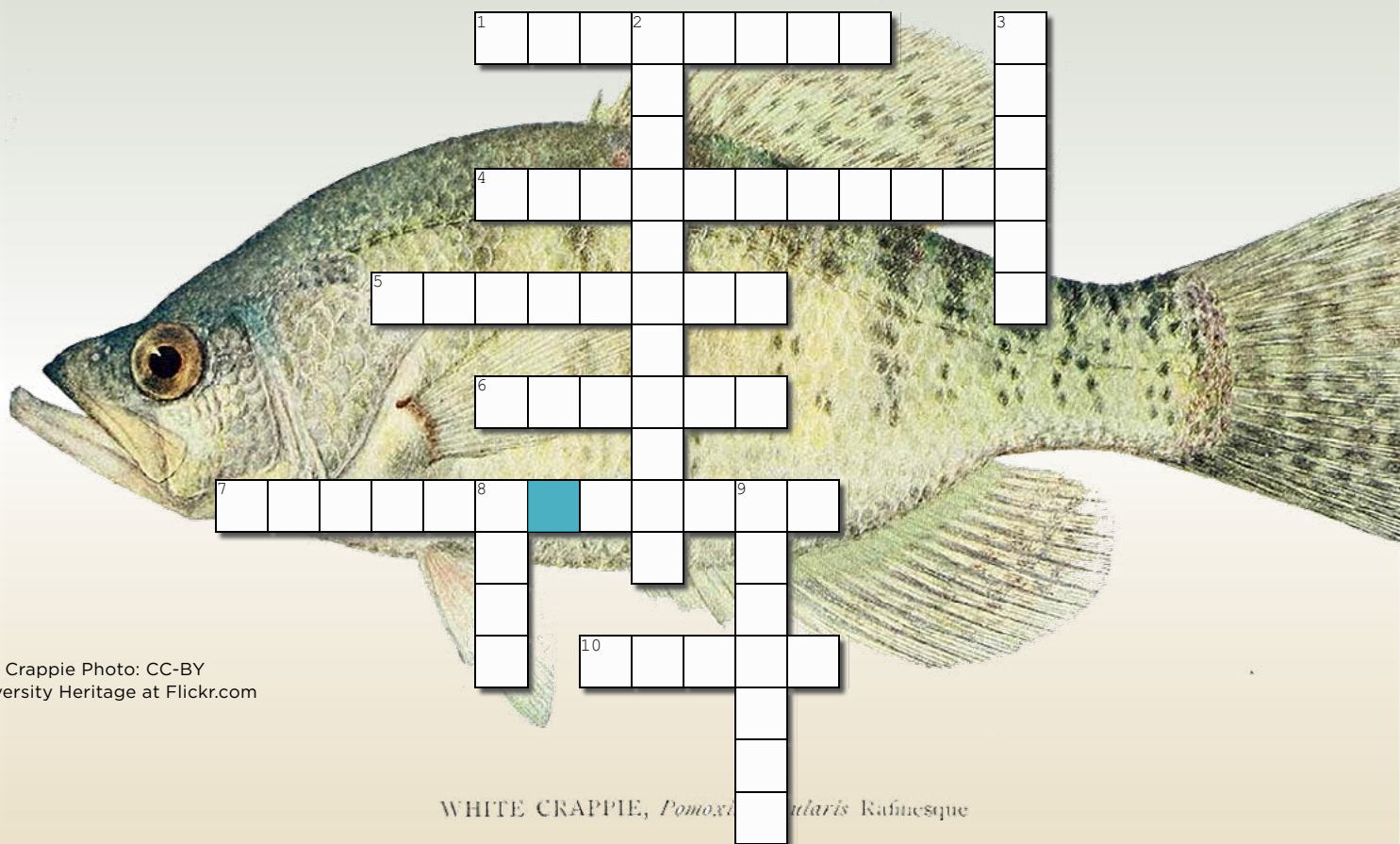
can get tangled in used fishing line left on the ground. They can become injured or even die if they cannot get untangled.

These are just a few things to do when fishing is slow. Can you think of others?



Photo: CC-BY Idaho Fish and Game

IDAHO'S PANFISH



White Crappie Photo: CC-BY
Biodiversity Heritage at Flickr.com

WHITE CRAPPIE, *Pomoxis annularis* Rafinesque

Created using the Crossword Maker on TheTeachersCorner.net

Across

1. Both black and white _____ may be found in Idaho.
4. Young panfish eat mostly _____.
5. This type of male panfish grunts to attract females.
6. This fin is the pokiest on panfish.
7. This fish's eggs are deposited in jelly-like ribbons.
10. _____ crappie have seven or eight spines in their dorsal fin.

Down

2. This fish may interbreed with bluegill.
3. Something that all panfish have in common.
8. Do panfish like warm or cold water?
9. This lake has the right conditions to grow 'jumbo' yellow perch.

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WE WOULD LIKE TO HEAR FROM YOU!

If you have a letter, poem or question for Wildlife Express, it may be included in a future issue!
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